

# 10 + 1 reasons for you to make students an offer they can't refuse!

Donna Drynan and the Canadian University Fieldwork Educators (CUFE) Subcommittee

In a continuing effort to engage occupational therapists in the education of students, it is timely to reflect on and update Andrew Neale's 2003 *OT Now* article, "10 reasons for you to make students an offer they can't refuse!"\*

The need for an increased number of placements still exists in Canada. In order to match all students with a breadth of fieldwork experiences so they are ready to enter practice, placement offers need to be from diverse practice areas. Changes in the systems where occupational therapists work (health, school, community, etc.), as well as changes in occupational therapists' workloads and actual job duties have been reported as deterrents for therapists to offer fieldwork experiences. Since fieldwork education is an essential part of the learning path of future therapists, it is a priority for academic programs to respond to these challenges to facilitate the provision of fieldwork opportunities in all sectors.

Progress has been made and work continues on raising the awareness of decision makers about this issue at the political level; for example, requesting more resources through the ministries of health and education. Work continues at the fieldwork sites' administrative level as well; for example, understanding what, if any, incentives help to engage therapists as fieldwork educators. Members of the Canadian University Fieldwork Educators (CUFE) subcommittee continue their efforts in raising these issues both within Canada as a whole and with fieldwork partners within their individual university catchment areas.

In this paper, CUFE is revisiting and exploring our perceptions and the evidence of the potential benefits and outcomes of educating occupational therapy students.

One of the important outcomes and benefits of being a fieldwork educator is the opportunity to share our knowledge. These students are future occupational therapists and will soon enter the workforce to help meet the health needs of the Canadian population (ACOTUP & CAOT, 2012). However, there are many other potential benefits to being a fieldwork educator. Presented here are the findings of an updated literature search and feedback from British Columbia fieldwork educators, offered through personal communication, feedback on student evaluation forms and feedback given during the University of British Columbia occupational therapy fieldwork educator workshops held throughout British Columbia since 2010. CUFE members invite you to consider the evidence and identify the benefits for your future involvement in fieldwork education.

*\*This article was adapted from Neale, A. (2003). 10 reasons for you to make students an offer they can't refuse! Occupational Therapy Now, 5 (2), 8-9.*

## 10 + 1 reasons to consider becoming a fieldwork educator

A review of the literature supports the following benefits of student fieldwork education:

### 1. Learning from students who bring new ideas and current thinking to your workplace

Students are educated in the 'latest and greatest' in occupational therapy theory and evidence. Feedback from educators shows that many students are enthusiastic to share their newfound knowledge in a non-threatening manner while on placement. Reciprocity is one of the hallmark characteristics within the teacher-learner relationship.

(See references: Bennett, 2003; Johnson, Haynes, & Ames, 2007; Swinehart & Meyers, 1993).

### 2. Stimulates your reflective practice and clinical reasoning skills

Many fieldwork educators reported that they had to constantly "transform theory into practice" when explaining their working practices to students, especially students in earlier placements. Fieldwork educators found that this process was beneficial as it required them to reflect on their practice. In addition, "providing fieldwork experiences for occupational therapy students was identified as an effective way to improve therapists' ability to explicitly describe the frameworks and models they use in practice, as well as an opportunity to gain reciprocal learning from the student, who may have more current knowledge available to guide practice" (Burrett, 2011, p. 14).

(See references: Bennett, 2003; Burrett, 2011; Cohn & Frum, 1988; Davies, Hanna, & Cott, 2011; Kinsella, 2000; Kinsella, 2001).

### 3. Enhances your professional development opportunities

Being involved in fieldwork education enhances a fieldwork educator's resume and professional portfolio. At least one regulatory college (The College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario) has tracked therapists' involvement in fieldwork education because of its positive effect on their professional development.

### 4. Develops professional skills, such as time management and priority setting

Therapists report that they need to set expectations with students and employ effective time management skills during the placement to make it a positive experience for all involved. Students report this to be one of the most favoured aspects of a placement to make them feel welcome and thus set the stage for their learning.

(See references: Higgs & McAllister, 2005; Johnson et al., 2007; Milner & Bossers, 2004; Swinehart & Meyers, 1993).

## 5. Provides an opportunity to share expertise with and recruit future colleagues

When a student has a positive experience on a placement they are more likely to apply for vacant positions within the same organization after graduation (especially important in organizations with a shortage of occupational therapists). Having a fieldwork placement in either the organization or the practice area is often a deciding factor of where students seek employment. Employers list fieldwork as one of the top two recruitment strategies.

(See references: Barney, Russell, & Clark, 1998; Bennett, 2003; Casares, Bradley, Jaffe, & Lee, 2003; Goffman, Lewis, Sutherland, & Drynan, 2008; Keller & Wilson, 2011; Randhawa, Wong, & Drynan, 2008; Swinehart & Meyers, 1993).

## 6. Creates and improves your links with universities

Fieldwork is an extensive and vital part of all occupational therapy education programs in Canada. Once an occupational therapist becomes known by a university and shows an interest in being involved in student education, other opportunities may be presented to use professional and teaching skills (e.g., guest speaker, organizing a clinic, committee work, collaborator on student research projects, small group facilitator, etc.). University programs provide workshops and written materials to help build your professional portfolio.

(See references: Jenkins, 2011; Kassam et al, in press).

## 7. Enhances your reputation within your workplace

Most professions recognize that practicum-based teaching demonstrates a commitment to the profession. Occupational therapists who regularly take students on fieldwork can be a wonderful role model to others within their teams and can be recognized within their organization as both expert clinicians and teachers. Recognition and contribution awards are often bestowed by workplaces, universities and professional associations or societies for excellence in clinical teaching.

(See reference: McAllister, 2005).

## 8. Increases productivity and access to occupational therapy for clients

Is this possible? The literature says “Yes!” Evidence reports that direct and indirect client care activities are up when students are present. Although it takes time, the time spent on student supervision adds up to less than the time students spend working with clients.

(See references: Bristow & Hagler, 1997; Burkhardt, 1985; Chung & Spelbring, 1983; Holland, 1997; Ladyshwesky, Bird, & Finney, 1994; McAllister, 2005; Paterson, 1997; Shalick & Shalik, 1988).

## 9. Develops teaching skills

Developing your student teaching skills is transferrable to working with clients. These skills can be applied to other classroom-based teaching opportunities and can also be used within the workplace

for staff in-services, as one example.

(See references: Hunt & Kennedy-Jones, 2010; Johnson et al., 2007; McAllister, 2005; Milner & Bossers, 2004; Nolinske, 1995; Provident, Leibold, Dolhi, & Jeffcoat, 2009).

## 10. Deeply rewarding for all involved

Many therapists report a deep sense of satisfaction on a personal and professional level at the conclusion of a placement. Results show that therapists feel a sense of achievement and they develop many skills when they have a student. In some cases, therapists had proven to themselves that they were indeed an ‘expert’ in their field.

(See references: DeWolfe, Laschinger, & Perkin, 2010; Rodger, Fitzgerald, Davila, Millar, & Allison, 2011).

## 11. Scholarship of practice

Program or department productivity may increase because students can complete projects that are of added value. Students can use their library privileges and database search experience to continue to support evidence-based practice, which therapists often say is difficult for them to do during the work day.

(See reference: Fortune & McKinstry, 2012).

There are a number of free resources and initiatives available across Canada to support therapists in their role as fieldwork educators and to bring new educators into the fold. Examples of these initiatives include: free face-to-face workshops to orient occupational therapists to the role of becoming a fieldwork educator, free online supervisory modules ([www.preceptor.ca](http://www.preceptor.ca), [www.practiceeducation.ca](http://www.practiceeducation.ca)), status faculty appointments at your catchment university, and recognition programs (thank-you events, educator awards) to name a few. CUFE encourages you to connect with your catchment university program to further explore the opportunities available. These benefits aside, many educators from multiple professions report that educating a student is a pleasure in itself and the feedback and thanks from students is recognition enough (Kassam et al., in press).

Want to know how you get involved in fieldwork education? Contact your local university academic fieldwork coordinator for more information: <http://www.acotup-acpue.ca/members.html>

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## Ensuring quality fieldwork education

The *Canadian Guidelines for Fieldwork Education in Occupational Therapy* (CGFEOT) (2011 revised edition) is a user-friendly tool for university fieldwork coordinators, fieldwork sites, preceptors, and students to ensure excellence in fieldwork education. The CGFEOT include principles to promote optimum fieldwork education, list responsibilities of fieldwork education partners, and propose tools and processes for supporting quality in fieldwork education.

The section, 'Principles Guiding the Canadian Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Experience' outlines expectations for the fieldwork experience. 'Responsibilities of Fieldwork Education Partners' emphasizes collaborative relationships within fieldwork. 'Tools and Processes to Support Quality in Canadian University Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Education' facilitates the exchange

of information between the university, fieldwork sites, and students. This section also outlines information that should be regularly collected by the university to ensure an optimum learning environment and fieldwork experience for all involved.

We encourage each of you involved in fieldwork education, whether you are a student, fieldwork coordinator, preceptor or faculty member, to review the revised CGFEOT to ensure that you understand and are fulfilling your part in our national desire to provide an optimal fieldwork experience for all.

The revised CGFEOT can be viewed at <http://www.caot.ca/pdfs/Exam/June7.pdf>

*Prepared on behalf of CUFÉ by Donna Barker (University of Toronto) and Jennifer Saunders (Dalhousie University).*